

# RUSSIAN FAMINE DUE TO POLITICS AND DROUGHT

**S**CANT idea of the extent and causes of the Russian famine that is taking its toll in hundreds of thousands is had here in America. To get at the facts, The New York Herald sent several trained observers into the stricken areas. One of them was Raymond Swing, staff correspondent in charge of The Herald's Berlin Bureau. Mr. Swing's report presented to-day is a human, understandable document that is bound to enlighten the reader.

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**T**HE Volga peasants have a proverb: "God commands thee, never show the bottoms of thy bins." For years, even during previous famines, this divine behest has been heeded, at least to a great extent. Reserves were saved for the next seeding, and enough as well to tide the great majority over the winter. The first really drastic famine in the history of the Volga is the present one, for this time the bins are empty.

In the great famine of 1891 help was forthcoming from the district itself. I met in Moscow an English business man, a former journalist, who had reported the famine of 1891 for the London Times, and related how relief had been organized by the "country gentlemen" of the Volga, as he designated the landowners, and how they had shown great self-sacrifice in favor of their peasants.

But now, though certain rich peasants may have reserves, they are not sharing; the bottoms of most of the bins of the Volga are bare. Not by the most generous estimate of the harvest could the district raise more than one-fourth of the food necessary to live through till next summer.

## Other Causes Caused Famine Besides Misgovernment

The assertion has often been made that the famine is the consequence of Bolshevik mismanagement. Only in an indirect way is this true. When the Don valley, the Ukraine and Siberia were cut off by civil wars the Volga had to bear the strain of feeding central Russia. And it was in this time that the bins were emptied. They were emptied ruthlessly, by requisition, often by force. The Communists in those days were not organizing the land or interested in perpetuating the traditional methods of distribution. The peasants to them appeared passive foes, "petty bourgeois," and beyond the pale of reform.

In their hostility toward the peasants the Communists lost what may have been the best opportunity to make the "great experiment" succeed. If instead of concentrating on the problems of industry they had spent more energy on the problems of agriculture they might have averted the dismal stagnation of this year. Not all Bolshevik leaders were blind to this chance. Lenine pleaded for reconciliation with the peasants months before the Kronstadt uprising made the new economic policy imperative.

Another assertion that the famine has weakened Bolshevik power also is not true in the way it is commonly understood. One must have been in Moscow and ridden by "express" train for thirty-six hours to Samara to comprehend how distant, geographically and mentally, the famine is from the capital. It is no exaggeration to say that Moscow is no more affected politically by the desolation on the Volga than if the ten stricken governments bordered on the Pacific.

What might the political influence be? The refugees "marching on Moscow"? To march on Moscow from Samara would be like sweeping to New York on foot from South Bend, Ind. Might it be concern for the dying? The Moscow newspapers have published about the same number of columns of descriptions of conditions as those of New York. But there is this difference between Moscow and New York—the Russian capital has become numb to human misery; it has experienced so much itself. True, it is deprived of bread and is told that its share is destined for the Volga. And scores of benefit "free trade" concerts and plays are given for the famine victims. And Communists are commanded by the party to surrender all their gold, and workers vote a fortnight's pay, and even a horse race is allowed, the Government holding the bets, all on behalf of the suffering. The power of the Bolsheviks lies to some extent in the submission of the cities. But the famine as a human issue has not affected this power.

## Famine as an Issue Has Not Affected Bolsheviks

I do not pretend to be an authority on the famine or to know as much about it as Kalenin, the president of the Soviet Republic. Kalenin was a peasant before he became a metal worker and as the "peasant president" he is renowned for his profound knowledge of rural psychology and his superior wisdom in dealing with it. He recently completed a trip through the famine area, taken in his special train, with the company of one hundred Government officials. On this journey he talked to the peasants boldly, challenged them to produce their reserves and save themselves by co-operation. And when he returned to Moscow he wrote a long newspaper article, which gave the impression that the Volga situation might be saved without much foreign aid, and that matters already were pretty well in hand.

But I have it on quite as good authority

## Power of Lenine Weakened by Prevailing Distress and Death Because Red Government Can Furnish Only One-fourth of the Grain Required to Feed the Starving—Its Worst Mistake Was in Harboring Hostility Toward Peasants

Herewith are shown two recent and impressive photographs of Russian famine refugees from the Volga River country. The little girl in the lower panel is begging for a crust from railway travelers



as Kalenin that 200,000,000 poods of grain are needed to feed the hungry in the famine area until the next harvest, and that the Government can furnish at best only one-fourth of this. There are plans to borrow the remainder from foreign creditors. American relief is limited to the children, and at the time I left Moscow it did not provide by any means for all those in the famine area, let alone the Moscow Petrograd children, with their 60 per cent. tuberculosis and their infant mortality of 40 per cent.

## As Many May Starve as Fell On the French Side in the War

I asked Kameniev, who is in charge of official relief, what was to prevent as many people dying from the famine as fell on the French side in the war. He moved his hands in a sudden gesture, as though he would like to wipe my suggestion out of existence, and said it was impossible. But his preventive measure was a foreign loan. Visiting villages eighty miles from railroads, where supplies can penetrate only on sleds after the Volga freezes in November, I found no evidence of an organization in that backward district. I do not know how food should be distributed over the vast spaces even if it might be obtained by the Government. And then I am skeptical about Russian "plans." In those particular villages the population already had begun to die out, whatever Kalenin was writing in Moscow, and the rest cannot survive unless rescued. The greater part of the famine stricken are like these doomed villages; they lie far from railways, without a modern organization to aid them. Hundreds and hundreds of thousands, even millions, must die. And in Moscow, as in New York, little about it will be remarked.

In some quarters outside Russia it is assumed that the famine must breed discontent in the Volga itself, so that if an army invaded Russia bringing food, the countryside would rise against the Government. The peasants are not by any means pro-Bolshevik. I hear that their priests have taught them that the famine is the punishment of God for their suffering the Bolsheviks to remain in power, though more of them, I imagine, may know it is the punishment for baring the bottoms of their bins. But the Volga is a land of death and disaster, not of rebellion.

An army bringing food might count on a pitiful welcome, but not on recruits. And what army is to march over scorched fields, bearing its own supplies and food besides for 15,000,000 people? The Volga is asking for mercy, not revenge.

This generalization holds despite the smoldering enmity to the government of the Kulaki, or "fists," who still are numerous in and about the Samara government. These are bands of rich peasants, a class created by special privileges in the way of land ownership and endowment bestowed in times of Czarist agrarian reforms. They remained a cohesive group after the revolution, seeking to protect their interests from the "poor peasants" whom the Bolsheviks backed against them. For a time their hands terrorized the Samara district, coming into villages and killing off the Soviet Mayor, his Communist comrades and the village school teacher if she were a Communist. If a punitive expedition was heard of, they blew up bridges and railroad tracks in its advance. Order was established in Samara only after a large force had been sent down, and the fact of the Red Army had been borne home to the peasant mind, both by heavy reprisals and by its appearing in numbers no longer to be flouted.

No one can pretend that the disaster of 15,000,000 peasants in a country even of Russia's magnitude does not injure the Government, which cannot adequately bring relief. The future is influenced by the ability of the Volga to recover, and though

perhaps two-thirds of the fall seeding could be undertaken, thanks to a supply of grain from other parts, the famine region will be weaker next year, and Russia as a whole will be likewise weaker. But that so much suffering and so great a waste of human life can have so little political weight is in itself a gauge of the extreme exhaustion of Russia.

It is hard to exaggerate the anxiety felt in Moscow over the possible use of the American relief organization for counter-revolutionary purposes. American activities in the Murmansk intervention and American support of the Kronstadt uprising, and above all the admitted share in Bela Kun's overthrow by T. T. C. Gregory of the American Relief Administration, have ranked Americans, especially American relief workers, as more suspect for Moscow than any foreigners, excepting the French.

This reputation was already redeemed in part by the impression for integrity made upon Litvinov by Walter Brown, who conducted the negotiations at Riga, and it subsequently has been completely changed by the character of the American Relief Administration men who entered Russia. I heard them unequivocally commended by Bolshevik leaders, and the fears so acutely felt in the beginning have disappeared.

## Life in Moscow Is One Long Motor Scare

Coming back from the famine district to the comparative comfort of cities, what do we find? The one persistent impression Moscow makes is of penury. The swarms of emaciated people in the streets are dressed in patches, the houses have not been painted in a decade, the dirty cobble pavements are out of repair, the sidewalks are actually perilous with holes. There is, too, a teeming Asiatic activity, contributed to by the incessant stream of carts and wagons, the many pedestrians mostly carrying bundles, the ubiquitous dilapidated horse cab and the numberless pedlars lining the curb, as many as twenty to a block, with trays of pastries, cigarettes, bread and fruit.

A contemporary point is given the setting by the terrifying Soviet automobiles. They plunge down the hill beyond the For-

sign Office or race through the busiest roads with shrill muffler whistles shrieking like demons of some dark dreams. No matter where in Moscow the sound of a motor is heard there is an impulsive scurry for safety to the sidewalk.

The few street car lines, too, run the automobiles a close second in rush and danger. They usually are so crowded that they bulge with passengers, so that these protrude from the back platforms like things half stuffed into a pocket. And in

this state of fullness they hustle and bound along their tracks with the speed of express trains.

Just why automobiles and electric cars must fly in Moscow will always be baffling. It surely must be for the thrill of motion, not for hurry's sake. For they are the only objects endowed with alacrity in the capital of the slowest governmental apparatus and of the most procrastinating race in Europe. Fortunately there are not many of these mad vehicles in Moscow, for all Russia has only 5,000 automobiles in running order (out of a total of 40,000), and only a few car lines are operating. Such persons as are making money can afford the one-horse shays, which clatter slowly along the rough pavements, and which, despite the faded fittings and lethargic progress, are relatively expensive, costing from 15,000 to 50,000 rubles a trip.

The rest of Moscow walks, walks hours each day to and from work, to and from the markets, to and from the houses of friends, walks in bare feet, in sandals without socks, in high military boots, mostly malformed through too much service.

Poverty as seen in Moscow is remarkably general and is not set off, even after months of free trade and the accumulation of quite

are to be met with everywhere, always on the backs of important state functionaries, who received them as part of their remuneration.

Clothes, as Moscow has proved, do not wear out. They can be mended and patched ad infinitum. The chief caste distinctions then become marked, not by elegance or comfort, but by the skill with which old garments are kept presentable. I attended a concert in Moscow and scrutinized the clothing of the audience, trying to learn how men and women living in what on all sides is claimed as the most exhaustive penury could still put up such a fairly well groomed appearance. A closer inspection showed the makeshift nature of it all. Good looking hats were merely old straws, ingeniously sewed with bits of bright cloth for a pattern. Dresses had been made over to conform to the current styles abroad, and as for shoes they fortunately could not be seen.

## Fabulous Profits of Trade No Longer Need Be Concealed

Now that free trade has come to stay, it is hard to believe that the absence of spectacular luxury will be long maintained. Plenty of "speculators" had grown wealthy from commerce before it became legal, only they feared to show themselves because of the police. The profits of trade now are said to be fabulous in many instances, and it is certain that handsome private equipages, and great menages with lackeys in uniform, and the other evidences of Moscow's earlier commercial prosperity will soon be seen again.

Yet the beginnings of high living are still somewhat cramped. One cannot pay more than 100,000 rubles (less than \$1.50) for the best dinner in the Arbat, and even a generous glass of imported wine costs only 35,000. The prettiest tea room, near the Tverskaya, demands only 50,000 for real coffee and dainty luncheon sandwiches and salad. A ticket to a concert costs 6,000 to 8,000. Dozens after dozens of shops are opening, but they are not yet filled with that abundance of rich things which denote a luxurious life.

## New Free Trade Idea Not Adopted Generally

The new free trade is not yet making so great a difference in the habits acquired during the Bolshevik regime. True, already one small department store is operating, an institution expansive enough to employ cash girls and parcel wrappers. But most of the licensees have gone into business in a furtive spirit, as though afraid that if they made too great a show of success and piled up too tempting a stock a new decree would be issued one day and their property be confiscated. Most of the shops have begun timidly in a single room. The first to open were flower and millinery stores and hair establishments. The latest have been food stores de luxe, with windows showing such an assemblage of all the delicacies denied during the last years that dense crowds throng before them as long as there is daylight.

The large part of these stocks must have emerged from hiding, for no import is yet possible, and all merchandise was formally if not effectively confiscated after the October revolution. The hint is broadly made that before long much more will be brought out from secret places and the Moscow shops will regain some of their earlier opulence. Only recently the police found five million dollars worth of silks in a barn just outside the city, and it is natural to assume that other caches have not been discovered. When it becomes safe to fill up the shelves goods will not be wholly lacking from this source.

## Loot of All Kinds Comes From Citizens and the State

Government confiscation, however, meant that enormous valuable stores were seized and stowed away or put under seal. I was told that due to the ponderous processes of the inefficient bureaucracy, even to this day an inventory of this property has not been completed. And through the dishonesty of officials a vast value in confiscated goods has returned to the channels of commerce.

No one in Moscow pretends to deny that this is so. Lenine charges it in his speeches, Communists accept it as part of their "problem." The assertion is even made that virtually everything now on sale in the way of merchandise has been stolen from the State. How extensive this wholesale filching may be no one can say, not even the Government, which still has no record of or successful control over its possessions.

The new shopkeepers in some few cases may be former merchants, but many licensees are novices in the field of commerce. One of the best restaurants in the Arbat is operated by a former millionaire, his wife and son. All three wait on the guests, but do not hesitate to shake hands with them first. And in calling for a waiter the visitor must beware not to use "tavarisht" (comrade) as he would to nearly every one save a fallen bourgeois. He must say plain "citizen." If he tries to leave a tip he will find his money brought back to him.

Near by is another restaurant opened by the widow of the Czar's late Secretary of the Navy. The wife of one of Kerensky's Ministers, who was the daughter of one of Moscow's richest merchants, presides over the most successful tea room in town. It cost her about 30,000,000 rubles (less than \$1,000) to pay for her first year's license collect her equipment and arrange her rooms, a sum beyond the reach of even the previously well to do, but she had energy and friends and now transacts a lively business. She also deals in art objects on commission and many a treasure from some formerly resplendent house finds its way into her showcases, to be sold, like so much in Russia, for a fraction of its real value.

## Shipmasters Before the Mast Now

**T**HE slump in American export trade has virtually smashed the sacred dividing lines of the sea—the historic gap between a man and an officer. Captains, engineers and mates, men who possess licenses and who in their day have occupied positions of command, are going to sea in subordinate positions.

An old tanker cleared the other day with three licensed captains aboard, in addition to the man on the bridge, in the position of quartermasters. There are several cases on record of mates who have shipped as bosuns and able seamen. Engineers take jobs as coal passers and oilers, not sullenly, but with beaming faces.

At any time it is not uncommon to find men who have been empowered to command hard at work in the forecastle, but these are cases where the individual was deprived of his license through misbehavior of some kind—drunkenness, cargo broaching, &c.

The American able seaman finds himself in a sad plight. Not only have wages been materially reduced and the two watch system been restored, but ships are difficult to find. Dozens of men may be seen lounging hopefully in the Shipping Board employment office, day in, day out. No matter what the job, they snatch at it. Countless are the instances of able seamen, sailing ship men, with years of before the mast experi-

ence, taking jobs as deck boys and ordinary seamen.

The youngster whose fancy leads him down to the shipping has no opportunity worth mentioning with these experienced seamen bidding for the most insignificant jobs. Sometimes a job in the pantry or in the mess falls his way, but there, too, competition is keen, and if he gets the job it is because he is there when the others, discouraged, have gone away.

The foreign seaman is up against it even harder. He is handicapped by his nationality, a handicap which he has to face even in the offices of the private American ship lines. At the Seamen's Church Institute they can be seen any day in force, but there are never enough jobs to go round.

There are other ways of getting jobs than standing about offices. A man can get a ship by tramping along the waterfront asking skippers, "How about and whereabout and how soon do you go?" But it is a wearisome task. There are numerous private shipping agents who represent private lines and, in addition, sign crews for sailing ships, yachts and tugs. Business there is at a standstill. An interesting feature is the fact that no sailing ship goes a-begging for sailors these days. The amount of sailing tonnage afloat, however, is decreasing, so that even this type of job is scarce.

These are the conditions that breed beachcombers. There are probably more sailors sponging on their comrades to-day than there have been in many years. Particularly pathetic is the plight of the licensed men who, accustomed to large earnings, and in

many cases possessing dependent families, are forced to draw on their savings and to take whatever offers, however painful it be to their pride. Where their treatment of their subordinates has been rough in their days of command, they are almost certain to be subjected to an unenviable baiting.

Another factor which bears upon the job shortage is the fact that crews do not change with the frequency of old. A sailor is usually asked at the end of a voyage if he desires to sign on for the next voyage. This request is being answered nowadays in the affirmative, and such a man usually receives preference when the time for signing the articles for the new voyage arrives.

Able seamen would perhaps have a better chance to get work suited to their attainments if they were not so bent on getting work on Government owned and subsidized vessels. These vessels are still run on the three watch system, which among sailor folk is known as "four on and eight off." This means three shifts of men and an eight hour work day—that is, four hours of work alternated with eight hours rest. The old system was "four on, four off," and the one which prevails on the vessels of all other nations and on private owned vessels flying the American flag.

Once the point was that there are not enough American born seamen. To-day there are hosts of them. The drive of the navy and the merchant marine for recruits made landlubbers into seamen in wholesale quantities. When business is dull everybody suffers, but the poor sailor is one of the first to be hit.